

Circuit Court Judge with Chief Judge Michael K. Pope, 32nd Circuit Court

Keywords

Bench – The highest seat at the front of a courtroom, reserved for the judge(s).

Child Custody – The responsibility to care for and exercise control over a child.

Circuit Court – A trial court that handles felonies (serious crimes); civil lawsuits over \$25,000; and family matters, such as divorce, child custody, adoptions, child protective proceedings, juvenile delinquency, and personal protection orders. Circuit Courts also hear cases appealed from lower courts.

Civil Cases – Noncriminal cases between two or more parties, often involving money.

Contracts – Agreements between two or more people, which can be legally enforced.

Crime – Violation of criminal law punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine and/or costs (money).

Damages – Money paid to compensate a person who has been injured by the actions of another person.

Dispute – A disagreement.

Family Matters – Cases that involve families, including divorce, child custody, adoptions, and juvenile delinquency.

Felonies – Generally, a crime punishable by more than one year in state prison.

Judge – An elected official given authority to make decisions in civil and criminal proceedings in a court of justice. To serve in the state's judicial branch of government, a judge must be admitted to the practice of law for at least five years and be less than 70 years old at the time of election or appointment (to fill a vacancy). See also [Best of Justitia: Judges](#) (PDF).

Law School – A three-year course of study after earning a bachelor's (undergraduate) degree; schools must be accredited (officially approved) by the American Bar Association.

Major – A field of study at the undergraduate level with requirements to assure a student has a particular level of knowledge.

Sentence – The punishment imposed on the defendant following a conviction in a criminal proceeding.

For more definitions, see the Michigan Judicial Institute's [Handbook of Legal Terms](#).